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RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0245
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 2348
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 6877
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 001700

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SUBJECT: "WILD STRAWBERRY" STUDENT PROTEST DRAWS TO A CLOSE
AFTER MONTH-LONG HUMAN RIGHTS SIT-IN

REF: TAIPEI 1569

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young,
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Taiwan's "Wild Strawberry Student Movement" staged a peaceful march Sunday (Dec. 7) to demand revisions to Taiwan's Assembly and Parade Law, apologies from President Ma Ying-jeou and Premier Liu Chao-shiuan and resignations of Taiwan police and security chiefs for the police violence against demonstrators during last month's visit of PRC ARATS Chairman Chen Yunlin. The march marked the conclusion of a month-long sit-in protest as students decided to return to their universities and regroup to determine other tactics to broadcast their concerns. Although Taiwan's Cabinet proposed changes to the Assembly and Parade Law just days before the march, protesters deemed the amendments unsatisfactory. The "Wild Strawberry Student Movement" was the first sustained student protest downtown Taipei has seen in a number of years, perhaps presaging a return to political activism. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Participants in Taiwan's "Wild Strawberry Student Movement" ended their month-long protest with a peaceful human rights march yesterday in Taipei that attracted up to 3,000 participants of all ages and walks of life. Although students organized and spearheaded the march, many older people also joined the march, as the students' censure of alleged police violence against protesters during ARATS Chairman Chen's visit (reftel) and their call for peace and basic human rights won broad appeal from pan-Green supporters. In addition to northern Taiwan, other areas including southern Taiwan sent busloads of students to participate in the afternoon march near the Presidential Office, Legislative Yuan, Executive Yuan, and other prominent landmarks.

¶3. (SBU) Protesters reiterated their original demands, including amending Taiwan's Assembly and Parade Law, even though Taiwan's Cabinet announced proposed changes to the law on December 4. The current law requires organizers to apply for a permit to hold a demonstration. To show their dissatisfaction with this requirement, the students did not seek permission from authorities to march on Sunday. Although the students made an effort to "notify" the police, the police refused to accept their notification document. Consistent with current law, the police warned the demonstrators to disperse and reserved the right to take

legal action against the organizers, but did not attempt to physically stop the marchers. For their part, the students deployed volunteer squads to maintain order and prevent the demonstrators from disrupting traffic or causing other problems.

14. (SBU) Cabinet-proposed changes to the law include relaxing requirements so that organizers only need to notify police of demonstration plans instead of obtaining permission. The Wild Strawberry Movement, however, criticized the proposed amendment for including exceptions that would allow the police to reject plans or require plans to be adjusted when demonstrations are deemed to jeopardize "national security" or social order.

15. (SBU) In addition to demanding the amendment of Taiwan's Assembly and Parade Law, Sunday's marchers called on President Ma and Premier Liu to apologize for the alleged excessive use of force by the police during the protests against PRC ARATS Chairman Chen's visit in November. They also called for the resignation of National Police Director-General Wang Cho-chiun and National Security Bureau Director-General Tsai Chao-ming. One group of marchers included a person dressed in the costume of a Chinese emperor and wearing a Chen Yunlin mask. This Chinese "emperor" was attended by several persons dressed as imperial officials with masks depicting Ma, Liu, Wang, and Tsai. The students also held a mock funeral for Taiwan's human rights, playing the national anthem and covering the casket with an ROC flag.

Taiwan's Students Tougher than Expected

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16. (C) Yesterday's march was the culmination of a demonstration first launched by students and professors on November 6, the day that violence peaked between police and protesters against the visit of ARATS Chairman Chen Yunlin. The students and professors staged a sit-in in front of the Executive Yuan to criticize the "excessive" use of police force but the police physically removed the protesters the following night. However, the students regrouped and began a round-the-clock sit-in protest at Liberty Square (the former Chiang Kai-shek Memorial), which the police did not attempt to stop. Participants in the Liberty Square sit-in fluctuated from about a dozen to several hundred. Last Thursday afternoon (Dec. 4), AIT observed at least eight students sitting in makeshift tents joined by roughly 20 middle-age and older supporters.

17. (C) That the students were able to last a full month, enduring some bouts of bad weather, came as somewhat of a surprise. Some contacts anticipated the movement would die down early on, as the students were facing mid-term exams. Soochow University Professor Hsu Yung-ming had predicted to AIT that students would grow "tired" and the sit-in would probably end by mid-November. Large-scale student protests in the 1980s and early 1990s helped bring about Taiwan's democratization, but, in large part due to the success of the democracy movement, student protests in recent years have been much fewer. Today, Taiwan's youth (those born in the 1970s and 1980s) are nicknamed the "Strawberry Tribe" because they are considered soft, self-absorbed and unable to handle pressure. Nonetheless, there have been some intense student protests over the past couple of years, especially by a student movement aimed at preventing the destruction of some portions of the Losheng Sanatorium to make way for a Metro depot in suburban Taipei. Police removed the Losheng student protesters on December 3, and contractors began demolition.

18. (C) The Wild Strawberries remained determined to the end even though some realized their participation in the movement could come back to haunt them. Soochow University Political Science Professor and well-known pro-Green activist Lo Chih-cheng told us that military personnel remain active on

campuses by teaching classes, maintaining order and providing reports to authorities. Lo claimed some of these personnel ventured to Liberty Square to report on student demonstrators. Some students who joined yesterday's march indeed refrained from providing their full names to the media, citing worries about what could happen to them in the future.

Students Return to Universities, But Will They Be Back?

¶9. (C) Student organizers drew the sit-in to a close yesterday, calling on the KMT administration to promise that the excessive use of police force and other human rights violations, which, in their view, occurred during Chen Yunlin's visit, would not happen again. In the meantime, the students said they would closely monitor the forthcoming legislative debate on the police measures used during the Chen visit. Although they decided to leave Liberty Square, the Wild Strawberry students announced they would continue to work on new tactics to advance their cause.

Comment

¶10. (C) Although the DPP and other pan-Green political parties did not try to co-opt the Wild Strawberry movement, DPP Chair Tsai Ing-wen and former President Lee Teng-hui both visited the students at Liberty Square to show moral support. The KMT government, including President Ma, essentially ignored the student demonstrators, viewing the protest movement as politically-based and minor given the small numbers. They may also have calculated--correctly--that the protest would die out, especially after the government initiated the process to amend the law on demonstrations.

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